DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 061 582 EA 004 105

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TITLE The Poverty of Educational Administration.
PUB DATE Dec 71
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (57th, Chicago, Illinois, April 3-7, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Personnel; *Administrator Characteristics; *Administrator Education; *Administrator Qualifications; *Management Development; Speeches

ABSTRACT

This speech argues that educational administrators are ill-equipped to meet contemporary challenges because of their lack of present-day administrative knowledge. Two general modes of generating such knowledge are outlined and contrasted -- the humanist (involving verbal theory and "soft" data) and the scientific (involving formalized theory and "hard" data). A categorization of articles in Educational Administration Quarterly and Administrator's Notebook reveals an imbalance in favor of the humanist tradition. The implications of this imbalance for the advancement of knowledge and for the resultant service of university departments to the field are discussed. (Author)

ED 061582

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THE POVERTY OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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December, 1971

EA 004 105

THE POVERTY OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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An important reason why educational administrators appear ill-equipped to meet contemporary challenges is the poverty of present-day administrative knowledge. Two general modes of generating such a knowledge base are outlined and contrasted: the humanist (involving verbal theory and "soft" data) and the scientific (involving formalized theory and "hard" data). A categorization of articles in Educational Administration Quarterly and the Administrator's Notebook is carried out and reveals an imbalance towards the humanist tradition. Implications of this imbalance for the advancement of knowledge and for the resultant service of university departments to the field are discussed.

In a recent article in the Administrator's Notebook, Francis S. Chase contrasts the concerns of today's educational administrators with those of their predecessors. He suggests that "Education Administration appears as ill-equipped to meet contemporary challenges as it was to cope with those posed twenty years earlier."[1] It is well known that most professors and practitioners will readily agree with Chase. It would appear that field administrators are ill-equipped for a primary reason that they lack the knowledge base of causes and effects pertaining to matters of educational concern and action. Moreover, school principals and superintendents still pass through graduate programs and return to the field only to continue the practices based on a working knowledge gained prior to entry. Their testimony repeatedly reveals that while their university experiences were enriching, the time and effort expended was inadequate in helping them to cope with the realities of school administration. Such a lament is a familiar one and need not be elaborated further. But as university departments are the usual preparatory agencies for educational administrators, they hold the responsibility for providing the knowledge base for practice. It is with the relative poverty of this knowledge base and the universities' methods of attempting to produce such knowledge that this paper is concerned.

As a rather recently established area of academic inquiry, the

study of educational administration is able to draw upon the academic traditions of older fields and disciplines. Of the many traditions which might be pursued in the search for knowledge, two are of general relevance to the study of educational administration. These may be termed the humanistic or heuristic frame of reference and the scientific or rigorous method of investigation. The former method is known as "soft" while the latter is considered the "hard" approach to the investigation of problems. An outline of both modes of inquiry is presented so that their distinctive features may be compared.

THE HEURISTIC OR "SOFT" APPROACH

A humanist might begin by explaining his general orientation. He says that one's posture towards administrative inquiry should be one which is unbiased by the thinking of established theories and unfettered by what may be viewed as standard methods of investigation. One wants to be creative and to think divergently rather than simply solve problems. A principle concern is the search for the "golden question" or the pursuit of prescious insights which help to shed light on the ways of man. In short, one should state new problems to be solved, raise new questions, and argue new perspectives.

The humanist feels that a premature preoccupation with rigor may be highly constraining and that an overconcern with measureability of concepts may vastly reduce one's vision. Great insights are not necessarily quantifiable. In fact, it has been said that in social science only trivia can be properly measured. This implies that if a concept is nontrivial, it cannot be properly measured. The humanist believes that because one cannot measure administrative leadership

accurately is no reason for not pursuing the leadership problem.

The writings in administration contain countless examples of this approach. For instance, consider Educational Administration as a Social Process by Getzels, Lipham, and Campbell.[2] Their work is an attempt to expand the horizons of educational administrators by offering different ways in which administrative problems may be viewed. Those who internalize the ideas set forth are more sensitized to their relations with other persons within schools or in the community at large. Barnard's Functions of the Executive is an example of a valuable source of insight from outside the field of education.[3] Such professional development is also accompanied by personal enrichment since the knowledge gained is worthwhile beyond the educational or career context.

Regarding the source of insights, one attempts to gain inspiration from one's own intuition, through extensive reading of the literature in one's field, and through interaction with people. These are the means best suited for the understanding of human behavior. Theory construction is a complex process and simple observation cannot render the meanings underlying human behavior which are necessary for understanding.

It is felt that specification of relations is subordinate to the discovery of them. What is needed are more perceptive case studies and more enlightening exploratory studies using the techniques developed by experts in participant observation. The more factors one can address in a given situation, the more likely one will come to grips with the many variables operating in school situations. Arbitrary omissions may prove devastating to one's understanding of the problem. In addition, one wants to address the important issues

in administration such as teacher professionalism, community relations, and student power. Social theory must be relevant to be worthwhile. This is why it is wise to be in contact with principals whose experience and skill in solving practical problems make them valuable critics of both theory and research.

THE RIGOROUS OR "HARD" APPROACH

A scientist might respond by asserting his general position. He remarks that the way to make a contribution to administrative inquiry is by solving a problem either by showing that a number of hypotheses may be derived from a small set of assumptions or by demonstrating that a theory in the hard sense successfully predicts and explains human behavior on the basis of quantitative tests. One must be concerned with the soundness of a given theory, that is, its compatability with the real world and its consistency. One must also deal in countables or measureables, otherwise the data will never provide the feedback necessary to correct the theory.

The scientist believes that a preoccupation with speculation is sterile. Speculation is everyone's obligation, but such conjecture is only one step in the scientific process. What cannot be measured with some adequacy is set aside until the measurement problem is overcome. In general, problems will never be solved unless addressed in a quantitative manner. The scientist argues that there is much to count and measure in ongoing school administration, but perhaps educators have been diverted from such possibilities. Robert Merton states, "We have many concepts but fewer confirmed theories; many points of view, but few theorems; many 'approaches' but few arrivals."[4]

Regarding the usefulness of this approach, an example of a more theoretical piece of work is that by Charters where he posits a model of teacher attrition from school districts.[5] As far as application is concerned, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has published a monograph entitled Mathematical Models in Educational Planning which contains material on enrollment and economic considerations.[6] For that matter, the results of the scientific method in the physical and biological sciences attest to its potential in the field of educational administration.

But how would one go about building ideas which are so worthwhile? Knowledge must not only be inspired; it must be structured. A few, definitive pieces of work can provide the basis for cumulative knowledge. Human contact is only partly helpful, as is one's own intuition. The impetus for a science of social man must come from outside the boundaries of present social science. For example, economics has gradually made the transition from one style of inquiry to the other.

The concern for exploratory studies and single cases, from which generalization is almost impossible, is unwarranted. As for the number of variables being considered, they should be entered into a theory one at a time and with great restraint, giving full consideration to their influence upon the theory. Parsimony demands the fewest variables and the simplest relationships. With regard to practitioners in the field, laymen tend to have little knowledge of the scientific process; their comments should be welcomed but not always taken as crucial. As for the question of relevance, the important issues which are fertile for theory building

are not necessarily those which are the administrative problems of the day. What constitutes a problem should be determined by pre-existing theory. Scientists must have a right to irrelevance if progress is to be made.

SOME COMMENTS

The above discussion is a cursory review of two divergent philosophies of inquiry. Accommodations are sometimes difficult and when verbal encounters arise, intolerance may result. The humanist may show greater skepticism and become more threatened. He may understand what the scientist is trying to accomplish, but he does not appreciate the methods used. The scientist may resort to overstatements, mathematical aggression (innundation of the opposition with symbols and technical language), and may show a marked lack of sensitivity to the humanist's concerns. However, it is clear from the two positions that both may make a major contribution to the knowledge base of educational administration.

Assuming that a choice of perspective should be made among those who study administration, one method of resolving the problem would be to suggest a temporal order in the two approaches. Perhaps the humanist's techniques are more appropriate for a field of inquiry in its infancy where directions of investigation are uncertain and knowledge of any kind is slight. Later, once a store of knowledge is amassed, the scientist's techniques may be best employed to undertake more sophisticated analyses. Such an argument would favor the humanists. Unfortunately, it is not certain that such a process is in operation. The 'intuitive' studies often reside on the shelves unnoticed by those who are engaged in more rigorous

investigation since the particular insights required are usually of a different kind. The same applies to more "scientific" studies which are often too narrow in their focus to be of assistance to the humanist. So frequently the same general problem is addressed in such different ways that background literature has little to offer.

THE EMPHASIS TODAY

Two dimensions which may be used to distinguish the above perspectives are the kinds of theory and data which a study in administration might utilize. The humanist employs "soft" theory and "soft" data (verbal theory and difficult-to-measure concepts) while the scientist uses "hard" theory and "hard" data (formalized theory and unambiguously measureable concepts). If such a classification is a viable one, then it should be possible to categorize most works in educational administration according to their theoretical base and their data utilized. As some works are strictly theoretical, they may not be judged as to the data employed.

In order to determine the relative emphasis placed upon the two approaches in studies in educational administration, selections were drawn from two leading periodicals. All the articles in Educational Administration Quarterly from Winter 1966 to Winter 1971 and all the articles from Administrator's Notebook from January 1966 to April 1971 were categorized. The frequencies and percentages appear as follows:

EAQ

Data	Theory: Hard	Theory: Soft	N	%
Hard	1	13	14	19
None	3	17	20	27
Soft	0	40	40	54
N	4	70	74	
%	5	95		100

NOTEBOOK

Data	Theory: Hard	Theory: Soft	N	%
Hard	0	9	9	18
None	1	7	8	16
Soft	0	32	32	66
N	1	48	49	
%	2	98		100

COMBINED

Data	Theory: Hard	Theory: Soft	N	%
Hard	A 1	D 22	23	19
None	B 4	E 24	28	23
Soft	C 0	F 72	72	58
N	5	118	123	
%	4	96		100

For purposes of clarity, the combined cells have been lettered A through F to indicate the different kinds of articles. Cell A, containing those using hard theory and hard data, has only one article which is Bruno's derivation and application of a salary schedule model.[7] Cell B, with hard theory but no data present, contains Ohm's game model pertaining to conflict-of-interest situations[8] and also Charter's discussion of enrollment projections.[9] Cell C, where there would be hard theory and soft data, has no occupants. A formal theory of teacher morale is an example which could be placed in this cell. Cell D, having soft theory but hard data, has a considerable number of studies. One example of these is Haller's article on interdisciplinary knowledge in educational administration, where he appeals to no formal theory but uses numbers of journal citations as data.[10] Cell E, with soft theory and lacking immediate data, contains Bridges' and Bachr's article on the future of selection procedures.[11] Finally, cell F, where soft theory combines with soft data, is found to be the most populous, containing articles such as Flight's inquiry into successful and unsuccessful research and development organizations.[12]

It should be pointed out that any research which utilizes a verbal theory and difficult-to-measure concepts falls into category F regardless of an author's use of sophisticated statistical techniques such as multivariate multiple regression or factor analysis.

An examination of the frequencies reveals that EAQ and the Notebook differ little in their acceptance of papers as allocated to the various cells, except perhaps in the cases of cell E, where EAQ tends to accept more articles of a soft-theory no-data type, and cell F, where the Notebook tends to accept more of a soft-theory-soft-data variety. In both cases, the number of hard-data articles is small relative to the soft-data articles. Most dramatically, the proportion of hard-theory works is extremely small, registering 4% in the combined results.

THE QUESTION

In terms of functions served to date, it would seem that the humanist orientation is relatively successful at providing different points of view, but it is relatively unsuccessful at providing the solutions to problems which the practicing administrator must address. On the other hand, the scientific tradition is presently limited to a few problems in educational administration, and some of these it has managed to solve with a fair degree of certainty. However, the knowledge base of educational administration is admittedly extremely weak, despite its obvious richness in concepts and inferences. As has been demonstrated, it is the humanistic tradition which is largely dominant among professors. Whatever the optimal distribution of effort might be, it is suggested that one of the contributing factors to the poverty of educational administration is the above imbalance in emphasis between the two

general traditions of inquiry. This is not to state that any method may be substituted for the creativity and perseverance needed to build a store of knowledge. Rather, it is to suggest that a minimal or necessary condition for the complete advancement of knowledge is the pursuit of both perspectives. This is evidenced by other applied fields, where an engineer or physician requires both his sensitivity to different situations as much as he needs his scientific background for the successful execution of his work.

IMPLICATIONS

It has been demonstrated that there exists an imbalance in the methods that professors of educational administration use to carry out their attempts to create knowledge. While what has been termed the "humanistic" tradition is well represented, the "scientific" tradition is found only infrequently in the administrative literature. Since the imbalance in perspectives may be a cause of the acknowledged poverty of the knowledge base, then perhaps it is time to expand the horizons to include a more rigorous posture towards administrative inquiry. In the long-term view, intellectual honesty demands that as a collectivity, departments of educational administration do not adopt the one perspective to the exclusion of the other. Perhaps it is possible for such departments to encourage the existence of proponents of both perspectives within their ranks. It is in this way that the universities may ultimately provide the practitioner with the quality of service so desperately needed.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Francis S. Chase, "'We Look Before and After'- A Perspective on Educational Administration," Administrator's Notebook, Vol. XVII, No. 9 (May, 1969).

[2]J. Getzels, J. Lipham, and R. Campbell, Educational Administration as a Social Process: Theory, Research, and Practice (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

[3]C. Barnard, The Functions of the Executive (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1938).

[4]R. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, Third Edition, 1968) p. 52.

[5]W.W. Charters Jr., "Some Factors Affecting Teacher Survival in School Districts", American Educational Research Journal, Vol. VII, No. 1, 1970, pp. 1-28.

[6]Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Mathematical Models in Educational Planning , (Paris: O.E.C.D.), 1967.

[7]James E. Bruno, "An Alternative to the Fixed Step Salary Schedule", Educational Administration Quarterly, Vol. VI, No. 1, (Winter, 1970) pp. 26-46.

[8]Robert E. Ohm, "A Game Model Analysis of Conflicts of Interest Situations in Administration", Educational Administration Quarterly, Vol. IV, No. 3, (Autumn, 1968), pp. 70-84.

[9]W.W. Charters Jr., "The Logic Behind Enrollment Forecasting", Administrator's Notebook, Vol. XIX, No. 8 (April, 1971).

[10]Emil J. Haller, "The Interdisciplinary Ideology in Educational Administration: Some Preliminary Notes on the Sociology of Knowledge", Educational Administration Quarterly, Vol. IV, No.2, (Spring, 1968), pp. 61-79.

[11]Edwin M. Bridges and Melany E. Baehr, "The Future of Administrator Selection Procedures", Administrator's Notebook, Vol. XIX, No. 5, (January, 1971).

[12]David S. Flight, "Regional Laboratories and Educational Research and Development", Administrator's Notebook, Vol. XIX, No.3, (November, 1970).